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Reagan Sent Marcos Secret Message 12 Hours Before White House's Plea

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 27 — Twelve hours before the White House publicly called on President Ferdinand E. Marcos to step down, President Reagan sent a message to the Philippine leader that said that he, his family and close associates would be welcome to live in the United States. Administration officials said today.

Mr. Reagan's message Sunday afternoon, reflected a consensus that emerged among key policy makers at a previously undisclosed meeting Sunday morning at the home of Secretary of State George P. Shultz. At that time, State, Central Intelligence Agency and Defense officials agreed Mr. Marcos had to go, but could not be left in limbo as the Shah of Iran had been.

Mr. Reagan's personal message was designed to assure Mr. Marcos that he would not become an international wanderer if he left the Philippines without bloodshed, and was believed by American officials to be a major role in persuading a very reluctant Mr. Marcos to finally leave on Tuesday.

Amplifying and in some cases correcting the record on what happened in the hectic few days leading up to Mr. Marcos's departure from the Philippines Tuesday, the officials said Mr. Reagan sent two personal messages to Mr. Marcos on Sunday. The first, disclosed that day by the White House, was sent by Mr. Reagan from Camp David and said "I appeal to you" not to use force to try to remain in power.

Safe Haven Offered

The second, and more important message, offering Mr. Marcos a safe haven in this country, was drafted after a White House meeting that afternoon with his senior advisers, Administration officials disclosed today.

It was at that session that Mr. Reagan said "I agree" to Secretary of State Shultz's conclusion that Mr. Marcos could no longer rule the Philippines and that the time had come to invite him to the United States in a dignified and respectful manner, and not to treat him as poorly as the Carter Administration.

A participant in those meetings said today that senior American officials were determined that Mr. Marcos should be given every courtesy as an American ally through five Administrations. "We were all thinking about the Shah's miseries and agreed that this would not happen to Marcos."

But Mr. Marcos, he said, was aware not so much of the Shah's fate, but rather that of another former American ally, Ngo Dinh Diem, who was president of South Vietnam, until he was assassinated during a coup in 1963. "Marcos had Diem on his mind at all times," one official said. "He was very concerned about how he would leave his palace. He wanted to make sure he did not leave with a bullet."

Shultz Meets at Home

Mr. Shultz had met at his home in Bethesda, Md., on Sunday morning with top aides to hear the report of Philip C.

Habib, the special representative who had just returned. At that meeting, after a lengthy discussion, officials said, Mr. Shultz won the concurrence of the other participants to these conclusions that would be presented to Mr. Reagan later that day:

¶Mr. Marcos's ability to govern with the consent of his people had ended.

¶If he uses force to try to crush the opposition forces then led by Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile and the deputy chief of staff, Lieut. Gen. Fidel V. Ramos, this would sharply reduce the chances for a successful outcome.

¶It was of great importance to the United States that force not be used.

¶It would be very damaging to United States standing in the world if Mr. Marcos was treated like the Shah.

Gathered at Shultz's House

Those at Mr. Shultz's house besides Mr. Habib were Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger; Adm. William J. Crowe Jr., chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Robert M. Gates, deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency; Adm. John Poindexter, White House national security adviser; Michael H. Armacost, Under Secretary of State for political affairs; Paul D. Wolfowitz, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific affairs, and Richard L. Armitage, Assistant Secretary of Defense for international security policy.

In 1979, when the Shah of Iran fled his country, he was first offered safe haven in the United States, but decided instead to go to Morocco. But when he decided that he wanted to come to the United States after all, President Carter told him that he was not welcome. That created a political controversy with Henry A. Kissinger and David Rockefeller criticizing the Carter Administration for treating the old American ally as, in Mr. Kissinger's words, "a Flying Dutchman," a legendary ship that was doomed to sail forever.

Eventually, after staying in the Bahamas and Mexico, the Shah was permitted to enter the United States for medical treatment, a move which led to the seizure of the American Embassy in Teheran, Iran. The Carter Administration then virtually forced the Shah to go to Panama, from where he went to Egypt, before he died in 1980.

Mr. Reagan who was at Camp David last weekend, was told at about noon on Sunday of reports that troops loyal to Mr. Marcos might use force. He then dictated a personal message to Mr. Marcos that was flashed to Ambassador Stephen Bosworth, who read it to Mr. Marcos. In that message, Mr. Reagan made a strong appeal to Mr. Marcos not to use force.

Reagan Meets With Aides

From about 3 P.M. to 4:30 P.M. on Sunday afternoon, after Mr. Reagan had returned to the White House, he met with Mr. Shultz and other top Shultz's house earlier in the day. After Mr. Shultz outlined the conclusions of the morning meeting, there was some

questioning by Donald T. Regan, the White House chief of staff, of the recommendations, to make sure all the alternatives had been considered, a participant said.

Finally, Mr. Reagan agreed to the conclusions and stressed that he wanted Mr. Marcos to feel welcome in this country if he chose to come here. A personal message was drafted that said that Mr. Reagan "looked forward to President Marcos's working out a scenario for a transition government." It said that Mr. Marcos, his family and close associates would be welcome in the United States. It was sent to Mr. Bosworth who read it to Mr. Marcos.

At that time, Larry Speakes, the White House spokesman, was refusing to say whether Mr. Reagan believed Mr. Marcos should step down, despite repeated questioning from reporters. He said that because of the possibility of violence being used by the Marcos forces, the United States would cut off military aid if that happened.

Meanwhile, Mr. Shultz and Michael H. Armacost, the Under Secretary of State for political affairs, summoned Blas F. Ople, Mr. Marcos's Minister of Labor to the State Department at about 7 P.M. on Sunday.

Contents of Message Disclosed

Mr. Ople said today that Mr. Shultz "took me into his confidence" and disclosed the contents of the Reagan message to Mr. Marcos.

"The message was very skillfully phrased so as to avoid giving offense," Mr. Ople said in an interview. "The gist of it was that President Marcos should now phase himself out in favor of a transition government and the United States would facilitate his safety and his medical services for himself, his family and associates."

He said he tried to phone Mr. Marcos immediately but could not get through. At about 2 A.M. on Monday, he sent the message through the Philippine Embassy telex. He said that at 5 A.M., he was telephoned by Mr. Marcos.

The Public Statement

"He said he got the message and that it matched the message he had received from Bosworth," Mr. Ople said. "He started to argue against it. He felt deeply hurt by the betrayal of his friends in the United States."

At just about that time, the White House issued a public statement that it was time for a "peaceful transition" — the first time it had publicly called on Mr. Marcos to step down.

That touched off a series of phone calls from Mr. Marcos and his family to the United States and to the American Embassy in Manila. Mr. Marcos telephoned Senator Paul Laxalt on Monday afternoon to see if Mr. Reagan was really seeking his resignation and he was told that he was. Mrs. Marcos telephoned Nancy Reagan to see what she felt. Mrs. Reagan, according to her spokesman, expressed "our concern for the Marcoses' safety and told her that if they wanted to come to the United States, they certainly could."